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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 007603

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: CHARGE CALLS FOR A QUICK RETURN TO
DEMOCRACY WITH SUPREME COMMANDER

REF: A. SECSTATE 200365

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 07546 (CHARGE PRESSES MFA PERMSEC ON
MARTIAL LAW)

Classified By: Charge Alexander A. Arvizu. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Charge emphasized to Royal Thai Supreme Commander and Council for National Security member General Boonsrang Niampradith on December 26 the need for Thailand to make progress on lifting martial law throughout the country and to fulfill promises by senior officials to have a democratically-elected government in power within one year. Boonsrang took note of our concerns and seemed surprised that the royal decree lifting martial law in the majority of the country had not been issued. He predicted that the order would be issued soon. End Summary.

LIFTING MARTIAL LAW AND RESTORING DEMOCRACY

[1](#)2. (C) In a December 26 meeting at Royal Thai Supreme Command Headquarters, the Charge, accompanied by JUSMAGTHAI Chief and PolMil Officer, presented the democracy points outlined in reftel with Royal Thai Supreme Commander General Boonsrang Niampradith. In particular, the Charge reiterated U.S. concern over martial law. He told Boonsrang that, while Washington had welcomed the announcement that the Council for National Security (CNS) was lifting martial law in much of the country, concern was growing that the implementing decree for the order had not yet been signed and that martial law remained in effect in other parts of Thailand. Boonsrang seemed surprised to hear that the order implementing martial law had not been issued. After quickly conferring with his aides, Boonsrang asserted that the royal decree formally lifting martial law would be issued "very, very soon."

[1](#)3. (C) The Charge told Boonsrang that, by our calculation, martial law remained in effect in roughly 40 percent of the country. He told General Boonsrang that continuing to lift martial law and returning to the situation that existed before the September 19 coup would demonstrate the CNS's commitment to a timely return to democracy, in line with its previous pronouncements.

[1](#)4. (C) Boonsrang suggested that the term "martial law" was causing misperceptions among Americans and that martial law in Thailand was much less draconian than what was perceived in the United States. He explained that martial law has been in effect in parts of many border provinces for 30 years, serving as a tool allowing Thai military to inspect suspect cargo and respond to episodic violence that is beyond the capacity of the police to combat. Comparing the state of martial law in the country before the coup, he suggested that

martial law was only in place in "a few new provinces located in areas where 'undercurrents' supporting the old regime remain in place." Boonsrang suggested that the authorities needed the flexibility afforded by martial law to respond to security concerns in those new areas. He pointed to the recent wave of school burnings (septel) as one example of the type of security concern that troubles the CNS.

15. (C) The Charge suggested that an effective way to address this issue would be for embassy officials and Thai experts to meet to discuss the situation in each province and district in Thailand now under martial law and seek clarity on why the CNS deems martial law necessary in a particular district in order to maintain order. Boonsrang seemed open to this suggestion.

16. (C) The Charge went on to urge GEN Boonsrang, who is a member of the CNS, to move forward rapidly on the drafting of a new Constitution. Reminding Boonsrang that interim PM Surayud told the President at the Hanoi APEC senior leaders' meeting in November that the ratification of the new Constitution followed by democratic elections would take place within a year, the Charge emphasized the importance of moving rapidly and not letting timelines slip. He noted that the United States stood ready to provide technical assistance in drafting the new constitution and was planning to send experts to Bangkok to help Thai scholars.

COMMENT

17. (C) Boonsrang's surprise at learning that the lifting of martial law decree had not yet been issued is indicative of the CNS's lack of attention to certain details. We will continue to urge that the implementing decree be issued soon. Also, in line with paragraph 5 above, we are compiling

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detailed information outlining which parts of Thailand remain under martial law together with graphics of which districts were under martial law prior to the coup and which were not. We intend to share this information with Thai officials and scholars in hopes of nudging the government to move closer to the September 19 status quo ante.

ARVIZU